

# Principles of Interpretation Applied to an Interpretation of False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew



**Thrust Statement:** Christians should eliminate difficulties that stand in the way of correct interpretation.

**Scripture Reading:** [2 Timothy 2:15](#); [Acts 17:10-12](#); [Revelation 2:7](#)

As one approaches the study of God's Word, one is conscious that there are negative and positive influences on interpretation. The negative aspect of interpretation focuses on preunderstanding in one's approach to study. In other words, one's mind is filled with ideas, traditions, experiences, and so on, which interfere with correct understanding. Preunderstanding, to some extent, is the source of the many divisions that presently exist within Christendom. Yet, at the same time, preunderstanding is necessary (positive side), to some extent, to a proper understanding of God's written Revelation. If one's mind were a *tabular rasa* (The mind before it receives the impressions gained from experience.) it would not be possible for one to gain knowledge. Since the mind is not a *tabular rasa*, this makes knowledge possible.<sup>[1]</sup> If one assumes a preunderstanding of [Matthew 7:15](#) concerning "false prophets" before he or she begins one's work as an interpreter, this preunderstanding may color his or her interpretation. Preunderstanding may be either good or bad, depending on one's use. One must never forget that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning, not the interpreter's meaning. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., writes:

An interpreter might, of course, infer meanings which according to our judgment could not possibly under any circumstances be implied by the author's words, but in that case, we would reject the interpretation not because it is private but because it is probably wrong.<sup>[2]</sup>

It is in this same vein that Jaroslav Pelikan strips away all underbrush as he seeks to call attention to tradition that is not healthy:

Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant

research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.<sup>[3]</sup>

Before launching into the primary text for this particular study (**Matthew 7:15**), it is necessary to give some background in hermeneutics (the science of interpretation), along with an in-depth meaning of hermeneutics. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: “Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts.”<sup>[4]</sup> Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.<sup>[5]</sup> Hermeneutics<sup>[6]</sup> ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.<sup>[7]</sup> Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the “here” and “now.”<sup>[8]</sup> L. Berkhof makes the following succinct observation:

The *necessity* of the study of hermeneutics follows from several considerations:

- (1) Sin darkened the understanding of man, and still exercises a pernicious influence on his conscious mental life. Therefore, special efforts must be made to guard against error.
- (2) Men differ from one another in many ways that naturally cause them to drift apart mentally. They differ, for instance,
  - (a) in intellectual capacity, aesthetic taste, and moral quality resulting in a lack of spiritual affinity:
  - (b) in intellectual attainment, some being educated, and others uneducated; and
  - (c) in nationality, with a corresponding difference in language, forms of thought, customs, and morals.<sup>[9]</sup>

Hayes and Holiday define exegesis as an attempt “to reach an informed understanding of the text.”<sup>[10]</sup> It is possible for an interpreter to miss the point of the text if he or she does not consider the “linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings,” writes Cedric Johnson.<sup>[11]</sup> It is also in this vein that Berkhof cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution:

The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts.* The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the Confessions.<sup>[12]</sup>

To set the tone for this analysis of the principles of interpretation concerning **Matthew 7:15**, perhaps it would be helpful to review the experiences of numerous individuals within the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement. Many within this Movement encounter long-held traditions in his/her quest to understand the Word of God in its context.<sup>[13]</sup> It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the traditions of their

“interpretative community” with the Word itself. Johnson expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis observed that “what we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Untold numbers with whom I have discussed the science of exposition have shared their frustrations and have described their Christian journeys as “Gullible’s Travels.” Christians often accept what they are taught without question. It is in this sense that their interpretation is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, they have never taken the time to employ their minds subjectively in analyzing the Scripture for themselves, nor have they looked at the Scriptures objectively. Their interpretations are “ready-made or prefabricated meanings.”<sup>[15]</sup> Their interpretations are hand-me-downs from their interpretative community. Again, Fish rightly says, “In other words interpretive <sup>[16]</sup> communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned.”<sup>[17]</sup> In spite of Fish’s deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the “see-er” was an extending agent. This is what Sacks means when he says that a culture fills brains “so that they are alike in fine detail”; it fills them so that no one’s interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.<sup>[18]</sup>

Leaders, especially ministers within the Churches of Christ, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But their interpretation frequently is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the Biblical text.<sup>[19]</sup> Once more, the Gonzalezs’ caution: “We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us.”<sup>[20]</sup> It is still very difficult for individuals to conceive that one might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background.

Some religious writers within the Churches of Christ suppose they have all the answers. And as a result of this kind of intellectualization, the intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. To justify condemnation over against the so-called nonconformist, then **Matthew 7: 15** is cited: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

One must be careful that one does not go to the Scriptures to prove what one already believes, but rather to see what they say. Many are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that they cannot distinguish between interpretation and revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional

interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself.<sup>[21]</sup> This failure to discriminate between explanation and divine inspiration is one of the main obstacles that believers encounter in their efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God's people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative.

One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text.<sup>[22]</sup> People often tend to give preconceived beliefs the same authority as they give to the Bible. In other words, one's preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. One's own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for one to view the Scriptures without prejudice. One's prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text.<sup>[23]</sup> The culture of one's heritage controls the text of the Bible. One should never forget that one's own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. Frederic W. Farrar draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are "heretics." All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.<sup>[24]</sup>

## CONTEXTUAL INTERPRETATION

The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God's written revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that one attaches to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, the interpreter may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, a person's particular context tends to shape his/her understanding and interpretation of the message. Sidney Greidanus is correct when he says, "An interpreter must be careful not to read more into a text than is actually there at that particular stage of redemptive history."<sup>[25]</sup>

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. Remember that the context is the determining factor in trying to arrive at a correct insight. One must not employ Holy Scripture in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. Leroy Garrett points out with justification that

People tire of our equating our understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.<sup>[26]</sup>

One may cite **Matthew 7:15**—“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves”—correctly, but not necessarily speak *as* the Bible speaks. One may speak *where* the Bible speaks and not speak *as* the Bible speaks.<sup>[27]</sup> In order to understand this passage of Scripture, it is necessary to study the whole of Matthew’s Gospel before analyzing individual elements.

### **A BASIC PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION: VIEW OF THE WHOLE VERSUS THE PARTICULAR**

As one contemplates a study of the whole of Matthew’s Gospel, it is imperative that one examine the full text before an analysis of its parts (for example, **Matthew 7:15**). If a reader explores a specific verse without weighing its sum total, then one’s reflection may radically alter a correct view of a particular text. Examples of particularization of texts without contexts to support certain dogmatic presuppositions are rampant among many Christians. We may consider the following isolated Scriptures as examples of frequently cited texts that are misapplied by many sincere Christians to uphold a sectarian spirit that divides the Christian community for which Jesus prayed (**John 17**).

- Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves (**Matthew 7:15**).
- Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it (**7:13-14**).<sup>[28]</sup>
- If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (**5:29-30**).
- But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also (**5:39**).
- Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (**7:1-2**).<sup>[29]</sup>

It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When one approaches the Word of God, one should approach with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, one should be conscious of his/her own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. One’s interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. Everyone must have a self-critical stance toward

the tendency to impose one's own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the above Scripture citations ([Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24](#)).

For many believers, false prophets ([7:15](#)) are those who disagree with their brand of orthodoxy or interpretation of Scripture. Also, many appeal to the Scripture ([7:13-14](#)) about the small gate and the narrow road to give credence to their particular denominational stance as the only way to heaven. Some Christians have even taken the self-mutilation language ([5:29-30](#)) as a call to physical impairment of the body. Among the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, the turning of the right cheek ([5:39](#)) is cited as justification for not defending one's country in the time of war.<sup>[30]</sup>

One cannot necessarily just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. Everyone is to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. One needs to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this study on hermeneutics will assist one's understanding of the original setting in order to help remove twentieth century bifocals and journey back into the first century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often leads to distortions; one must guard against his/her interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Gospel of Matthew.

### General Overview of the Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel is remembered for its Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and the Golden Rule. The Gospel of Matthew is cherished for its union of Gospel and ethics, of faith and morality. Matthew's Gospel is concerned to recover the moral and ethical aspects of the Christian life, something that the Old Testament prophets also sought to capture. Matthew speaks against those who set themselves over against the ethical instructions of Jesus. For Matthew, it is not sufficient just to accept Jesus as the Messiah,

but one must obey Him. This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about—ethical behavior that is pleasing to God. In fact, Matthew includes the stern warning of Jesus against those who do not obey God: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” ([7:21](#)). Then, Matthew also concludes his Gospel with Jesus' admonition to His apostles to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” ([28:19-20](#)). Thus, Matthew begins and ends the ministry of Jesus with a call to correct conduct.

### The Gospel's Structure

Before one ventures into the narrative studies of the three major divisions of Matthew's Gospel, an analysis of the five major discourses in the Gospel of Matthew should help one in the identification of the false prophets of Jesus' time as well as the time of Matthew's writing this Gospel. The Gospel of Matthew appears to be written around five major discourses.



- The Sermon on the Mount (**5:1—8:1**)
- The Charge to the Apostles (**chapter 10**)
- The Parables (**chapter 13**)
- The Lesson on Forgiveness (**chapter 18**)
- The Judgment and End of Jerusalem (**chapters 24—25**)

Following the five discourses, Matthew gives a transition that concludes each major discourse:

- “When Jesus had finished saying these things” (**7:28**)
- “After Jesus had finished instructing” (**11:1**)
- “When Jesus had finished these parables” (**13:53**)
- “When Jesus had finished saying these things” (**19:1**)
- “When Jesus had finished saying all these things” (**26:1**)

Matthew’s Gospel can further be divided into ten sections in which “doing” and “teaching” alternate.

NARRATIVE	TEACHING	TRANSITION
<b>1—4</b>	<b>5—7</b>	<b>7:28</b>
<b>8:1—9:34</b>	<b>9:35—10:42</b>	<b>11:1</b>
<b>11:2—12:50</b>	<b>13:1—52</b>	<b>13:53</b>
<b>13:53—17:27</b>	<b>18:1—35</b>	<b>19:1</b>
<b>19:1—23:39</b>	<b>24:1—25:46</b>	<b>26:1</b>
<b>26:1—28:20</b>		
Passion Week		

Matthew portrays Jesus as *doer* and *teacher*. He records at least twenty miracles and six major messages. Approximately sixty percent of Matthew’s Gospel focuses on the teachings of Jesus. It is also significant that he arranges his material in a topical, rather than a chronological order. For instance, he groups ten miracles together in **chapters 8—9**. The above outline helps one to look at the discourses in context in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the conflict that existed between Jesus and the Pharisees. Since this research is about the application of hermeneutical principals in seeking to identify the false prophets of whom Jesus spoke, it is necessary to devote some time to the history of the Pharisees and oral tradition. This history of the Pharisees for purposes of this study culminates in the events that transpired in Jamnia about 90 CE.

## PHARISEES AND ORAL TRADITION

Orthodox Judaism is not simply “Old Testament theology without Jesus.” It is the religion of “You have heard it said.” This was Jesus’ repeated response to the erroneous oral teachings of the Pharisees. We can use the same technique today as we examine the Talmud.<sup>[31]</sup>

When Jesus appeared on the scene, He confronted over one hundred and fifty years of traditions from the Pharisees. Blomberg says, “According to Josephus, the Pharisees emerged at least as early as the reign of John Hyrcanus, opposing the combination of kingly and priestly power in the Hasmonean rulers.”<sup>[32]</sup> Elwell and Yarbrough point out that the name “Pharisee” probably derives from an Aramaic word meaning ‘separate’; hence, the Pharisees were ‘the separate ones.’<sup>[33]</sup> Since the synagogues were under their control and leadership, Blair calls attention to the strong influence that the Pharisees had among the Israelites.<sup>[34]</sup> It is this control that John the Baptist and Jesus encountered in the beginning of their ministries. There are three basic sources that individuals rely upon for their information concerning the Pharisees: (1) Josephus, (2) the New Testament, and (3) rabbinic documents.

## JOSEPHUS

The writings of Josephus help to shed light on Jesus’ encounter with the religious leaders with their oral traditions. These oral traditions were later codified about 200 C.E.<sup>[35]</sup> The Pharisees built up a body of tradition that was as binding as the written Torah. Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, written ca. 94 CE, wrote of the traditions of the Pharisees:

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.<sup>[36]</sup>

The oral law was for the Pharisee equal to the written law. As Murphy has written, “The Pharisees built up a substantial body of tradition that was as binding for them as written Torah. This tradition probably corresponds to the later rabbinic idea of oral Torah. For the rabbis oral Torah was an integral part of the Torah given to Moses on Sinai, but it was passed on orally through the generations.”<sup>[37]</sup> The stress upon the Oral Torah by the Pharisees is what caused the Pharisees to confront Jesus about His disciples breaking the “tradition of the elders.” Matthew preserves this encounter:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!” Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,’ he is not to ‘honor his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of



your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ““These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”” ([Matthew 15:1-9](#)).

In the time of Christ, the Pharisees numbered about six thousand.<sup>[38]</sup> Josephus wrote about an incidence that occurred during the time of Herod the Great (37 BCE to 4 CE) which states the approximate number of Pharisees during this time.

(41) For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. (42) Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king’s government, these very men did not swear, being above six thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras’s wife paid their fine for them.<sup>[39]</sup>

Before approaching the second source (New Testament) of our knowledge about the Pharisees, a comment by Scheindlin graphically captures the role that the Pharisees played during the reigns of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BCE), Aristobulus I (104-103 BCE), Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE), and Salome Alexandra (76-67 BCE).

Another group that was sometimes in opposition to the Hasmoneans was the Pharisees. They seem originally to have been non-priests who were eager to observe a strict rule of ritual purity and religious probity, and who therefore sometimes came into conflict with the authorities. Their leadership did not claim a cultic function, like the priests, but rather expertise in religious law and lore based on a body of religious traditions supplementary to the Torah, which they called ‘the oral Torah.’ They laid stress on the obligation of each individual to observe religious practices of ever-increasing complexity and detail, rather than simply relying on the priesthood to accomplish the nation’s religious duties vicariously by offering sacrifices on their behalf. By the first century C.E., their number included some priests and aristocrats as well.<sup>[40]</sup>

## NEW TESTAMENT

This background of the Pharisees from Josephus sets the stage for a proper understanding of the role that the Pharisees played in their plot to ultimately destroy Jesus who posed a threat to their authority. To grasp Pharisaic history, one must not study Phariseeism in isolation from its historical roots and the strong political power this group yielded during the time of John Hyrcanus, the ministry of Jesus, and the academy established in Jamnia following the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Jesus questioned their authority and this act got Him into trouble with the religious leaders.

As stated above the religion of the Pharisees is the religion of “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago” ([Matthew 5:21](#)). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount,

dealt with the oral Torah of the Pharisees. This now-famous Sermon set the stage for the controversies that followed Jesus throughout His ministry. Davies aptly stresses the meaning of “You have heard” in his analysis of three passages in Matthew (12:1-14; 15:1-20; 19:1-19).<sup>[41]</sup> In the first citation (12:1-14), Jesus discusses the Pharisees’ oral traditions about the Sabbath; in the second reference (15:1-20), Jesus again addresses the oral Torah of the Pharisees concerning the laws of purity; and in the third quotation (19:1-19), He addresses their traditions concerning divorce.

Jesus, in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, warned His disciples about false prophets (7:15). Prior to this admonition, Jesus went right to the heart of oral traditions. This analysis and condemnation of the oral Torah of the Pharisees by Jesus is conceded by many modern day scholars. Davies, one such scholar, assesses the true intent of the Sermon on the Mount when he writes, “the SM itself is not set forth as a ‘new’, revolutionary Law, in sharp antithesis to that given on Sinai.”<sup>[42]</sup> Again, Davies points out, with justice, that the “You have heard” but “I tell you” is Jesus’ ethical demands set over against those of Judaism.<sup>[43]</sup> North also states the matter firmly: “The approach I have chosen here is to adopt Jesus’ use of the technique, ‘You have heard it said.’ What He was attacking in each case was either a false tradition of the Pharisees or a false interpretation they imposed on an Old Testament text.”<sup>[44]</sup>

Glasscock does not overstate the case when he says, “Jesus was about to attack the oral interpretation of the law, which most Jews of the time had been conditioned to accept as the Law itself. Six times in the next few verses he will challenge their oral traditions.”<sup>[45]</sup> Hagner also notes that “By means of six bold antitheses representing the teaching of Jesus, Matthew now contrasts Jesus’ exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Torah with the more common, rabbinic understandings of the commandments.”<sup>[46]</sup>

The oral Torah was not codified until ca. 200 CE.<sup>[47]</sup> North illustrates through citations from the Mishnah and the Gemarah,<sup>[48]</sup> which is the codification of the oral Torah,<sup>[49]</sup> that there are contradictions between the written Torah and the oral Torah. Pilkington comments on the origin of the oral Torah: “The collection we now have in the Mishnah was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince (*Ha-Nasi*), who lived from 135 to 217 CE. . . . ‘Oral’ is indeed an apt description of the Torah which followed the written Torah because it was essentially a record of oral discussion in courtrooms and academies.”<sup>[50]</sup>

The Pharisees were in revolt against God’s written law; that is, the oral law was on par with the written law. The Jewish leaders carried out this rebellion in the name of God’s law. This melting together of the two laws caused Jesus to issue a scathing rebuke against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. Matthew succinctly captures one such confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the

gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean ([Matthew 23:15-27](#)).

Jesus not only concludes His ministry with a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders, but He also began His ministry with a brief analysis of their rejection of the written Torah for their oral Torah. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discusses the “You have heard” (oral Torah) with “but I say unto you” (written Torah). For an extra Biblical source (oral) of this kind of unbiblical reasoning can be found among Israel’s religious leaders. For instance, Rabbi Eleazar issued a statement—following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE—upon the meaning of “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” His commentary is a classic example of “You have heard.” The Babylonian Talmud gives the following comment about Eleazar’s commentary: “R. Eleazar further stated: What is meant by the Scriptural text, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh? This teaches that Adam had intercourse with every beast and animal but found no satisfaction until he cohabited with Eve.”<sup>[51]</sup> If Matthew had recorded this saying, one could also find Jesus’ “but I say unto you”: “Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death” ([Exodus 22:19](#)).

The Pharisees with their oral Torah exercised tremendous political power before, during, and after the ministry of Christ. It is in this regard to political power that Rosenberg draws attention to the domination that the Pharisees had even over the Sadducees:

Since the Sadducees were for the most part Temple priests and wealthy aristocrats, their influence over the people as a whole was rather limited, and during much of their existence they had to abide by the rulings and interpretations of the Pharisees (This extended even to the procedures of the Temple sacrifices, although the chief priests were themselves Sadducees.) With the destruction of the Temple the Sadducees ceased to exist as a sect.<sup>[52]</sup>

Their power extended even to the control of the synagogues. This control also existed even in the time of Jesus. Even when many of the leaders of Israel believed on

Jesus, still they would not confess Him for fear of being thrown out of the synagogues by the Pharisees. John, an apostle of Jesus, writes about the tremendous influence exercised by the Pharisees: “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God (12:42-43).<sup>[53]</sup>

Paul, a Pharisee, sets an example of the hatred of the Pharisees against Christians. In the Philippian letter, he describes his ancestry and earlier behavior toward the church: “If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless” (Philippians 3:4-6).<sup>[54]</sup> Luke calls attention, in his book to Theophilus, to the hatred exercised by some Pharisees against the followers of Jesus. One such person that Luke names is Paul; Luke lets his readers know that prior to Paul’s conversion that he gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Opposition to Stephen arose as a result of members from the “Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia” (6:9).

After the conversion of Paul, he, too, had to warn against the circumcision group (Titus 1:11). Paul tells Titus that

They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. Even one of their own prophets has said, “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good (1:11-16).

The Pharisees were a part of this circumcision group. When some men from Judea went to Antioch, they created problems by insisting that unless one was circumcised according to the Law of Moses, then one could not be saved (Acts 15:1). As a result of this controversy, a council met at Jerusalem (15:4). During the meeting of the church, which included the apostles and elders, Luke reports, “some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses’” (15:5). The influence of the Pharisees remained a viable force throughout the ministry of Paul. The Pharisees were so strong that they managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and establish a school in Jamnia (in Galilee).

## POST-70 CE AND THE PHARISEES

Following the Jewish War, the center of Jewish life moved to Jabneh (in Greek, Jamnia) under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai. The priesthood, the sacrifices, and

the temple worship ceased as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.<sup>[55]</sup> After 70 CE, the terms “Pharisee” and “scribe” drop out of common usage and is replaced with “rabbi.” The Jewish leaders who survived the fall of Jerusalem gathered at Jamnia, in western Judea, and began studying the Torah.<sup>[56]</sup>

Johanan ben Zakkai, who opposed the war, managed to escape the city by letting it be understood that he was dead. The Romans allowed those in the city to carry out their dead in coffins and bury them outside the city. Once he was on the outside, he went to Vespasian who granted him the right to establish a school in Jamnia.<sup>[57]</sup> The religious leadership passed from the priesthood to the rabbis. Scheindlin calls attention to the important role that Johanan ben Zakkai played in establishing rabbinic Judaism following the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes,

What had to be guaranteed was the religious tradition embodied in the Torah and in the ever-proliferating body of religious laws. Johanan ben Zakkai and his colleagues thus took an important step in reorganizing Judaism into rabbinic Judaism, the form of the religion most widespread until the present. Rabbinic Judaism centers on the constant study of the Torah and the oral traditions associated with it and involves the meticulous observance of religious regulations, which are understood as constituting a legal system. By placing the study of the Torah at the center of Jewish religious life, the rabbis incidentally laid the foundation for the preoccupation of later Jewish culture with intellectual activities of all kinds.<sup>[58]</sup>

Thus concludes Lavinia and Cohn-Sherbok that “It was the pharisaic interpretation of the law that survived and was continued in the work of the rabbis.”<sup>[59]</sup> The destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE did not destroy the political clout of the Pharisees. Even before the destruction of the temple, the interpretive tradition was well developed. Rabbi Rosenberg says,

Because this interpretive tradition was well developed by the time of the Temple’s destruction in the great revolt, Judaism was able to survive. Since the largest portion of the people looked to the Pharisaic sages for guidance, the end of the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple could be accepted, for the Pharisees mandated other forms of religious expression that could take its place.<sup>[60]</sup>

Sanders’ writings also collaborate the findings of Rosenberg: “The Hasidim (at the time of the Hasmonean revolt) were Pharisees, and the post-70 rabbis were Pharisees; throughout the whole period 175 BCE to 135 CE the populace basically followed the Pharisees.”<sup>[61]</sup> This history of the Pharisees before and after the destruction of Jerusalem helps one to understand more clearly the ones to whom the term “false prophets” refer in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5–7](#)) in His castigation of the religious leaders in Israel ([Matthew 23](#)) and in His Eschatological Discourse ([Matthew 24](#)).

## JAMNIA

Some scholars espouse a date of 85–100 CE for the writing of the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>[62]</sup> This date is given in conjunction with the events that transpired in Jamnia ca. 90 CE. This notion of a late date is advanced in order to maintain that Matthew’s

purpose in writing was to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia. But Carson approaches the purpose and early date with caution: “It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose, because the possibility of error and distortion increases as one leaves hard evidence behind for supposition.”<sup>[63]</sup> It appears, so it seems to me, that Matthew’s Gospel is dealing with the establishment of the identity of Jesus. But in this identity, Matthew records many of the encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew’s Gospel sets forth the uneasy feelings between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Gospel is not so much anti-Jewish as it is anti-Jewish leaders in their conflict with Jesus the Messiah.<sup>[64]</sup>

Murphy asserts that Matthew rewrote the traditions to make the Pharisees look worse.<sup>[65]</sup> One cannot but be respectful to the suggestion, but difficulties remain with his presuppositions. He correctly assesses the events that surrounded Jamnia when he writes about the Pharisees and Jamnia, but when he asserts that this Gospel was written to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia, he cites no concrete evidence to substantiate his allegations:

After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, a group of Pharisees, scribes, and others gathered at Jamnia to restructure Jewish society in the absence of the Temple and its establishment. They confirmed the Torah as the center of the life of the Jewish people, and made Pharisaic interpretation normative for all. Torah teachers were now called rabbis. The budding Christian movement now faced not a multiplicity of groups, but a rabbinic Judaism that claimed that it alone was normative. This caused the Christians to define themselves over against rabbinic Judaism. Many have seen the activity at Jamnia as the background against which to read the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>[66]</sup>

As noted above from the writings of Josephus and the New Testament, it goes almost without saying that Pharisaism dominated pre-70 Judaism as well as post-70 rabbinic Judaism. There are substantial continuities between them concerning an emphasis on non-biblical or oral traditions.<sup>[67]</sup> The Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders during His ministry. Jamnia does confirm the entrenchment that the Pharisees had during Jesus’ ministry; they never lost their zeal for the traditions of the elders—before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. Sanders also calls attention to the name change of the Pharisees following the destruction of the Jerusalem: “After the destruction of Jerusalem, they led the reconstruction of Judaism, giving up their party name, becoming more catholic, and taking the title ‘rabbis’, ‘teachers’.”<sup>[68]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This analysis of the principles of interpretation has sought to make interpreters conscious of how prior understanding can affect one’s current understanding of Scripture. All Christians who open God’s Word and read it bring with them the forestructures of their lives formed by their history, their language, and their culture in which they live, therefore it is imperative upon every reader to capture the original intent of the author. Since no one can approach the text without presuppositions, then one must exercise every safeguard to interpret the Word of God correctly.

In addition, this investigation of how to read the Word of God more accurately has only skimmed the surface in the area of interpretation to set the stage for an identification of the false prophets in **Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24**. The objective of this examination of the principles of interpretation applied has been to help Christians to continue to correctly



handle the Word of truth ([2. Timothy 2:15](#)).

Since the Gospel of Matthew is a story, that is to say, a narrative about the life of Jesus, then the next study in the examination of “false prophets” in the Gospel of Matthew presents a brief overview of the Gospel of Matthew as narrative in order to grasp more fully the principles of interpretation in identifying false prophets in Matthew’s Gospel. An understanding of narrative studies should help one in reading Matthew’s Gospel. In order to ascertain the identity of the false prophets with whom Jesus and Matthew had dispute, then an awareness of plot (story line) in narrative studies should help one to correctly classify the phony prophets in [Matthew 7:15](#) and [24:11, 24](#). This chapter discusses in detail the benefits of narrative studies in seeking a correct application or interpretation of any individual text or texts. The following remarks by Hirsch sums up the need for consulting the author as to the intended meaning to be assigned to any text:

Once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text’s meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation. By an inner necessity the study of “what a text says” to an individual critic. It became fashionable to talk about a critic’s “reading” of a text, and this word began to appear in the titles of scholarly works. The word seemed to imply that if the author had been banished, the critic still remained, and his new, original, urbane, ingenious, or relevant “reading” carried its own interest.<sup>[69]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> For an insightful article on preunderstanding, see Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986), 14-22.

<sup>[2]</sup> E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 14.

<sup>[3]</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

<sup>[4]</sup> Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, “Hermeneutics,” *NTC’s Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97. This in-depth study on hermeneutics applies the hermeneutic circle in order to identify the false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew.

<sup>[5]</sup> Ibid.

[6] See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: “The term ‘hermeneutics,’ . . . simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation; Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God’s Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, “In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another.”

[7] See Morner and Rausch, “Exegesis,” *Ibid.*, 72,73, where they say, “Originally, the detailed analysis, explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage.”

[8] See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

[9] L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 12.

[10] John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner’s Handbook, Revised Edition* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23..

[11] Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20. See Dallas Burdette’s website: [www.freedominchrist.net](http://www.freedominchrist.net) for an examination of this principle, “Passover Traditions in the First Century,” for an example of the application of the above principles—“linguistic, cultural, and historical background,” located under SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under LORD’S SUPPER.

[12] Berkhof, *Interpretation*, 28-29.

[13] See Hayes and Holladay, *Exegesis*, 66, where they write:

The best guide to the meaning of a word is the context in which it is used. This means, first of all, the immediate context of the passage in which it occurs. If a word has several meanings, one should explore the range of meanings and see how they fit or do not fit in the context. A broader context is the whole of the document in which the terms appear. One should explore how a term is used and what it denotes elsewhere in the document.

[14] Johnson, *Interpretation*, 45.

[15] Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172.

[16] Fish does not use “interpretative community” but “interpretive community.”

[17] Ibid. I disagree with Fish's philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a deconstructionist in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, "Deconstructive Criticism," *NTC's Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain "deconstruction":

An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive criticism utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author's intention and deny the possibility of a terminate meaning or "correct" interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism makes possible innumerable contradictory but "undecidable" meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s, deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

[18] Ibid., 335.

[19] See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

[20] Ibid., 31.

[21] For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975) : 68-71.

[22] See Johnson, *Interpretation* , 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

[23] For an excellent presentation of this concept, see Gonzalez and Gonzalez, "Difficulties in Hearing the Text," in *Preaching*, 29-47.

[24] Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[25] Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 71.

[26] Garrett, "It Means What It Says," 69.

[27] For an in-depth study of the cliché, see Dallas Burdette, "We Speak Where the Bible Speaks" [ONLINE], available from [www.freedominchrist.net](http://www.freedominchrist.net) [accessed 8 July 2004] located under the caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the

subheading HERMENEUTICS.

[28] For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, “The Narrow Gate” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 8 July 2004] located under caption MISAPPLIED/TWISTED SCRIPTURES.

[29] For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, “Judge Not” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 8 July 2004] located under caption MISAPPLIED/TWISTED SCRIPTURES.

[30] For an examination of this much-debated Scripture, see Dallas Burdette, “The Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline Accounts” [ONLINE]. Available from <http://www.freedominchrist.net> [accessed 8 July 2004] located under caption SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under the subheading DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE.

[31] Gary North, *The Judeo-Christian Tradition: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 73.

[32] Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 47. For an excellent overview of this time period, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 25-49.

[33] Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 56. Elwell and Yarbrough add some additional information to the history of the Pharisees: “They came into being sometime before the New Testament era. According to Josephus they gained prominence during the reigns of John Hyrcanus I (135/4—104 B.C.) and Alexandra (76-67 B.C.), Ibid. The date of the Pharisees predates even the reign of Hyrcanus. Josephus mentions the Pharisees’ activities during the time of Jonathan (B. C. 161-143; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 13, Ch. 5, Sect. 7, Par. 161 and Sect. 9, Par. 171, in Whiston, 345, 346. For an excellent history of the Pharisees, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 66 BCE—66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 380-451.

[34] Joe Blair, *Introducing the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 42.

[35] See Rabbi Roy A. Rosenberg, *The Concise Guide to Judaism: History, Practice, Faith* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 67, where he says,

The early tradition of the Pharisees had held that, while the written Torah was meant to be transmitted in written form, the oral Torah was not to be put in writing. The teachings of the sages were to be memorized, rather, and transmitted by word of mouth from scholar to scholar. It did not take long, of course, for the number of interpretations and decisions that constituted

the oral Torah to become so vast that even the most brilliant scholars would have trouble recalling all of them (they also had to remember the names of the various sages who had originated or transmitted a decision). For this reason the head of the academy in the early years of the third century, Rabbi Judah the Nasi (“prince,” or “patriarch”), resolved to reduce the oral Torah to writing. . . . Then in about 220 A. D., he introduced the first authoritative summary of the rabbinic tradition to that date. This was the *Mishna* (“repetition”). The Mishna, based upon the laws of the Hebrew Bible, is the source of all subsequent Jewish law to the present day and is an object of study in the academies of all the forms of Judaism.

<sup>[36]</sup> See William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. XIII, Ch. X, Sect. 6, Par. 297, in *The Works of Josephus*, New Updated Edition (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1987), 355.

<sup>[37]</sup> Frederick J. Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 223.

<sup>[38]</sup> See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 377, where he has an interesting comment about the six thousand Pharisees:

We do not know for sure how many Pharisees there were in the time of Jesus. The figure of six thousand, often quoted in this context from Josephus *Antiquities* 17.42, refers specifically to the Pharisees who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar, some time in the reign of Herod the Great. In the forty years or so between that incident and the time of Jesus several important political events had taken place, which might well have induced many more to join the movement. We may assume that there were in any case plenty of Pharisees who were not involved with the particular incident in question, and more again who were generally sympathetic to the movement.

<sup>[39]</sup> Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, Bk. 17, Ch. 2, Sect. 4, Par. 41-42, in *Josephus*, 453. I am indebted to Frederick J. Murphy for this citation.

<sup>[40]</sup> Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 40. His statement about “ever-increasing complexity” reminds one of Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees: They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them (Matthew 23:4).”

<sup>[41]</sup> W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 30.

<sup>[42]</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>[43]</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>[44]</sup> North, *Tradition*, 86. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, expanded edition with replies to critics (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1984), where he says, “These radical commands (vv. 21-48) do not supercede the Older Testamental law; they illustrate and explain it. . . . The law demanded inner sanctification and its outward expression; the scribes and Pharisees disregarded the former and perverted the latter.”

<sup>[45]</sup> Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 116.

<sup>[46]</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol., 33a, *Matthew 1—13* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 111.

<sup>[47]</sup> See Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 67; Murphy, *Jesus*, 235.

<sup>[48]</sup> This combination is called the Babylonian Talmud.

<sup>[49]</sup> North, *Tradition*, 84-105. See also Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, translated from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (USA: Basic Books, 1976), where he explains the Talmud:

The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of *halakhah* (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidation of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.

This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein.

<sup>[50]</sup> C. M. Pilkington, *Judaism* (US: NTC Publishing Group, 1995), 37. For a copy of the Mishnah, see Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>[51]</sup> See Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth 63a*, in *The Soncino Talmud* [CD-ROM]. Available from Davaka's Judaic Software, item no., Win CD #1W691B, call 1-800-621-8227 for this CD, cost \$299.00, [accessed 8 July 2004]. I am indebted to North for this citation; see North, *Tradition*, 86-87. Also see North for many examples as illustrated above in his book, *Ibid.*, 84-105.

<sup>[52]</sup> Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 61.

<sup>[53]</sup> See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE—66 CE*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 388-412, for a detailed study of the influence and control the Pharisees had in the first century.

<sup>[54]</sup> See **also Galatians 1:13f.; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 8:3; 9:1, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10f.; 1 Thessalonians 2:14f.; Galatians 4:29; 6:12.**

<sup>[55]</sup> Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 87.



[56] Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Jesus and the First Christians*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 37.

[57] Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 52. See also Lavinia, “Johanan ben Zakkai,” in *Judaism*, 88.

[58] Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 53.

[59] Lavinia, “Pharisee,” in *Judaism*, 134.

[60] Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 66.

[61] Sanders, *Judaism*, 400.

[62] See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 48-55. See also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1—13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a (Texas: Word Book, 1993), lxxiii—lxxv, for caution on both sides of the issue of dating. See also D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 75-81, for a conservative view on the provenance, date, and destination of the Gospel of Matthew.

[63] D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in Frank E. Gaebelin, vol., 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 22.

[64] Carson, “Matthew,” in *Bible Commentary*, 20.

[65] Murphy, *Jesus*, 232.

[66] *Ibid.*, 234.

[67] Sanders, *Judaism*, 413.

[68] *Ibid.*, 412.

[69] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 3.